

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2009

The Honorable Robert Gates
The Office of Secretary of Defense
1155 Defense Pentagon Way
Room 3D921
Washington, DC 20301

We are writing to convey our support for the Army plan to assign an additional Brigade Combat Team (BCT) to the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field, Georgia. We share your expressed concern for the great hardship endured by the soldiers and their families and agree with your guiding principle to prevent the under-manning of units for combat while changing the policy on stop-loss. We believe the plan to bring the 5th BCT to Fort Stewart is in concert with the guiding principle of your statement on April 6th and will continue the progress made in revitalizing our armed forces.

Unquestionably, Fort Stewart is, for numerous strategic reasons, an ideal location for the Army to grow. But just as important it is imperative that the Army and the Department of Defense not lose sight of the issue of reliance—that state and local governments and the civic and business leaders relied on the request of the Army and the Department to be ready to accommodate these soldiers and their families. Accordingly, they have already invested about \$450 million dollars in anticipation of the arrival of the BCT.

While we recognize the extensive military analysis and fiscal constraints required in determining the location of a BCT, we firmly believe that it is in the best interest of the Department of Defense to take into full account the investment at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field made by local communities long ago. The communities made these decisions by taking to heart the clear assurance from Department leaders that the BCT was coming. They responded to the Department's requests to provide the essential private sector support in advance of the arrival of the Brigade. In deciding this issue, we believe the Army and the Department must consider the extensive, good faith reliance of its partner community. The Department must live up to its commitments. It must not break its word.

The City of Hinesville, the surrounding communities, and the State of Georgia have demonstrated unwavering support for soldiers and families over many years. The area now is clearly recognized as one of the most Army-friendly installation in the U.S. Community

leaders have faithfully and diligently worked with the Department and the private sector to ensure that the facilities and infrastructure is ready to receive the additional brigade. To date the community's investment of about \$450 million in preparation for the expected growth to include \$72 million in public school projects and other public sector infrastructure investment. The State of Georgia has again expanded its acclaimed HOPE Scholarship program to further extend the access to military families for full tuition, room and board to any Georgia public college or university for students who graduate from high school with a B average.


We believe adding the 46th BCT in the Army to Fort Stewart would enhance the immediate operational effectiveness of the 3rd Infantry Division at the Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field. When taking into consideration the emerging Center of Maneuver Excellence at Fort Benning and the growing presence of the BCTs at Fort Stewart, the Army has an exceptional home base in the state of Georgia to meet all mission challenges for our nation's defense. Resources are already either in place or pending final construction to swiftly accommodate the arrival of the new Brigade and their families. No other U.S installation can so effectively and quickly meet these needs. Commanders would have an Army unit with maximum adaptability and capability to meet combat requirements. Soldiers would be able to focus on their training, knowing that their families are settling into an installation and community that continues to welcome and accommodate them.


Fort Stewart's strategic location in southeast Georgia makes it easily accessible by road, rail and sea. Hunter Army Air Field provides a strategic Airborne Point of Entry for unit deployment. Movement to ports takes place in hours vice days and weeks. At 280,000 acres, Fort Stewart is the largest military installation east of the Mississippi River. The Army has invested some \$670 million at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field in the past three years making it one of the most modern and efficient installations in the nation with additional construction pending for increased capacity. Training is efficient and cost effective due to the installation's digital multipurpose range training complex and other facilities located within minutes of the cantonment areas. Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field also has no significant environmental impact or encroachment issues. Just this month Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field won its fourth Army Community of Excellence installation award.

Accordingly, it is our request that the Department continue as originally planned to expand growth at Fort Stewart through the assignment of the additional BCT without adversely affecting the alignment of the current forces stationed at Fort Stewart and Fort Benning. We urge you to meet with Fort Stewart community leaders in the near future and permit them the opportunity to directly share their views and additional information on this issue.


Thank you for your distinguished service to our nation and thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,


John Barrow


Jack Kingston


Sanford Bishop


Paul Broun


Hank Johnson



Nathan Deal


John Lewis


Phil Gingrey


Jim Marshall


John Linder


David Scott


Tom Price


Lynn Westmoreland